

"Sloth" solo a year later). His current baby, which he found in 1972, is vintage 1958 with no customizing and played through an old Fender Deluxe amp set at half treble, half bass.

"I've always used the in-between pickup setting on my guitar. I put the five-position switch between the second and third pickup to get a hollow ring, more sustain, since I pick fairly light most of the time." Thompson's picking is actually a combination of plectrum on the lower bassy strings and finger-picking up top, coupling that rock 'n' roll thrust with the almost classical agility of his artful trills and weepy harmonic slides as on the new ballad "Just The Motion" from *Shoot Out The Lights*.

"I've always done that," he giggles. "I started out flat picking and then took classical lessons. But I was too lazy to

put the pick down altogether. I don't strum much, though."


It's only appropriate that the current Richard & Linda Thompson Band, blessed with one of the most distinctive and poignant original songbooks in either English or American pop, is short on hardware hounds. Dave Mattacks, whose simple but forceful articulate drumming both with the Fairport/Thompson family and on copious sessions invites comparisons with the Band's Levon Helm, uses a spare Yamaha kit with bass drum, two toms, three cymbals and snare. Simon Nicol plays tasteful rhythm and supporting fills on a mutant mid-60s Strat with the wrong body and a crooked neck. He also owns a 12-string Rickenbacker but didn't bring it on the last tour because he doesn't have a case. For acoustic numbers, Thompson

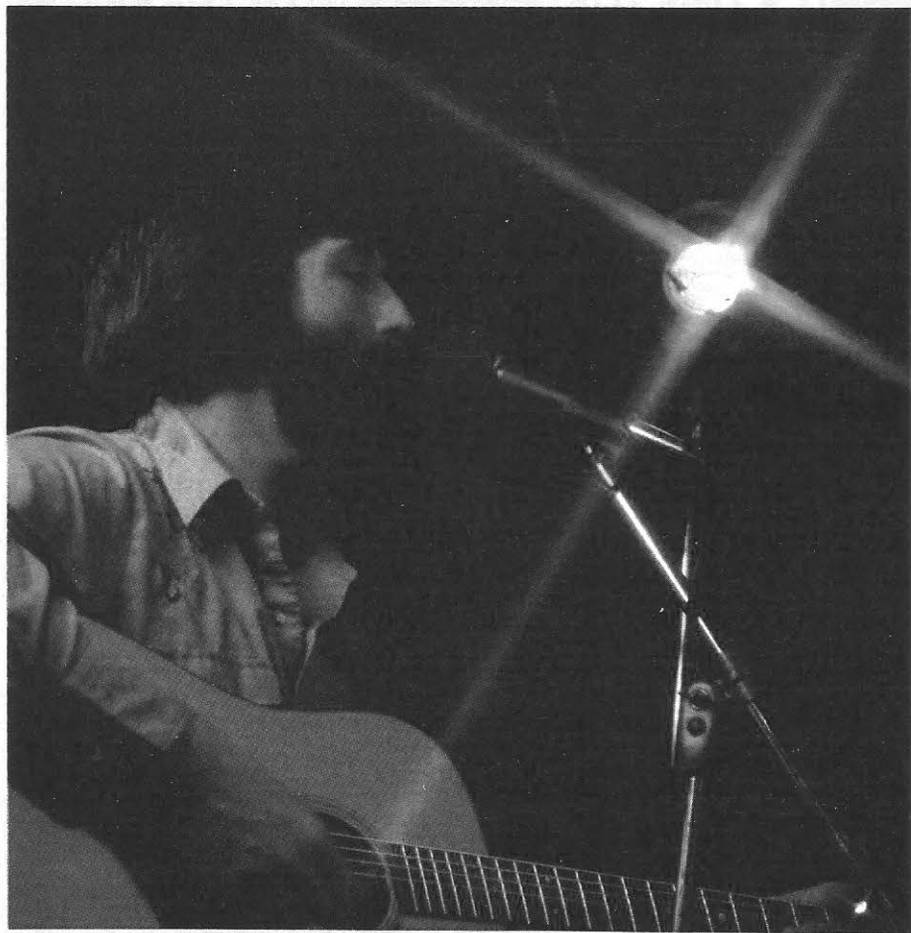
sticks with a triple O-size Martin. Only Pete Zorn, who did some time with Gerry Rafferty, can boast any choice gear—a custom-designed bass by Wall of England that in concert he plugs right into the instrument P.A., using his amp as a monitor.

Yet with such alarmingly ordinary equipment, Richard Thompson—not to mention his band—makes astonishingly expressive music, at once as personal as his religious devotion yet as wide open as his world music view. That doesn't just go for the Fairport work or his albums with Linda; there is also a rainbow collection of session appearances to consider, from the troubled bal-ladry of the late Nick Drake to the fractured dadaist art-punk of Pere Ubu singer David Thomas's recent solo LP *The Sound Of The Sand*. But all this praise is making our subject uneasy.

"You'll have to excuse the self-deprecating Englishmen here," says Nicol, who just finished citing Thompson as his only guitar influence. "It's very hard to say to another Englishman that he's great. It's an old English tradition. Americans go on patting each other on the back all the time. We get truly embarrassed."

"Actually," Thompson announces with mock pomp, "I'm great, you're great, we're all great," gesturing across the tiny hotel room at Mattacks and Zorn, "together, I mean."

"But Richard," Nicol casts a sly wink my way, "is truly great." 

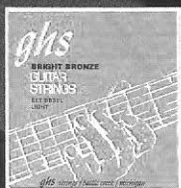


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and his band sounds as limp as a wet noodle. Pass the bicarb.

Ted Nugent — *Nugent* (Atlantic) In these ten songs of sex, violence and rock 'n' roll, the Motor City Madman sets himself up as a sort of heavy metal John Wayne, buzzing with patriotism, integrity and unfocused aggression. I think I'd find the political songs, like the anti-Iranian "Bound And Gagged," a lot funnier if I thought the Nuge was joking; as it is, they sound like our current foreign policy through Marshall amps. On the other hand, Ted Nugent is probably the only guy in the world who could do a song like "We're Gonna Rock Tonight" and make me believe it.

The O'Jays — *My Favorite Person* (Philadelphia International) Few groups try for the old Philly Soul magic these days, and fewer still pull it off with the panache of the O'Jays. Perhaps that's because the O'Jay's were one of the few groups in the Gamble & Huff stable who valued harmonies over the groove; in any case, it has been those wonderfully lush three-part vocals that have kept the group sounding fresh, and they carry the day here—particularly the ballads, with "Your Body's Here (But Your Mind's On The Other Side Of Town)" ranking among their best work ever.



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